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A Call for Change

11.13.2007 | Research, Culture and Society U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown of Ohio has called on eBay and the Consumer Product Safety Commission to be more aggressive in protecting consumers from recalled toys sold on the Web auction site — as a result of research conducted by a University of Dayton assistant professor of psychology.

"eBay should take a more active role to protect families that use their Web site. More importantly, the CPSC must take responsibility to better protect all consumers from recalled toys," Brown said in letter to the chair of the CPSC and the chair of eBay. He asked them to more strongly police the Web auction site by removing recalled products, and by better screening offerings to identify

recalled products and prevent them from being listed on the site.

In an article published in August in the Injury Prevention journal, lead author Keri Brown Kirschman, assistant professor of psychology, found a significant number of recalled children's products and toys are being offered for sale through online auction sites, such as eBay, and are sold most of the time, continuing to keep unsafe products in circulation.

Kirschman, who specializes in child psychology and pediatric injury prevention, searched for 141 recalled items including bassinets, play yards, baby walkers and safety devices, found the items offered in 190 online auctions, and for 30 days tracked their paths on eBay.

"It appears from my research that the mechanisms to prevent the resale of unsafe children's products are largely unsuccessful because recalled items are sold most of the time," she said.

Kirschman's research, "Resale of recalled children's products online: an examination of the world's largest yard sale," was conducted in 2004, but she said the problem appears to be continuing. She purchased several recalled products from eBay this fall, even after more than 10 million toys were recalled from the marketplace earlier this year.

To reduce the number of recalled products online, Kirschman suggested that online auction sites require more information from sellers and more vigorously enforce their own policies prohibiting sale of recalled items through closer monitoring and prompt removal of such items from the site.

She also said that direct links to product recall Web sites such as <http://www.recalls.gov> should be prominently displayed at the bottom of each product listing.

Kirschman said such measures would only address part of the problem. Decreasing the number of recalled products in circulation would help to stem the flow of potentially dangerous products at their sources, she said.

"Manufacturers should be required to be more aggressive in retrieval of recalled products, and the Consumer Product Safety Commission should investigate alternative ways to advertise present and past recalls," she said.